

DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP

A monthly magazine devoted to the collecting, preservation and literature of the old-time dime and nickel novels, libraries and popular story papers.

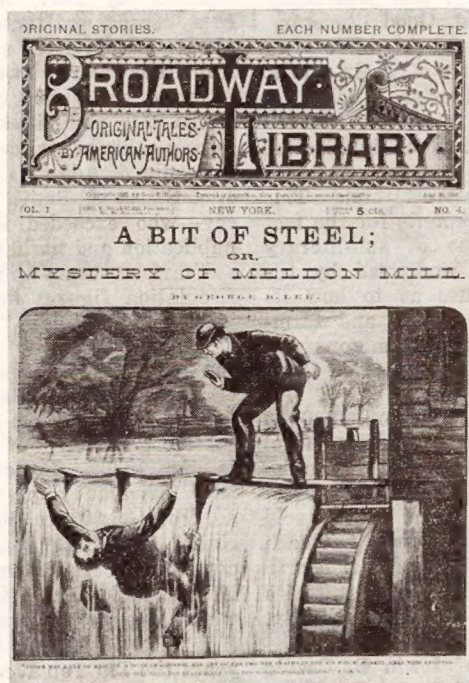
Vol. 39 No. 9

September 15, 1970

Whole No. 456

The Dime Novel As An Historian's Tool

By William A. Settle, Jr.



DIME NOVEL SKETCHES NO. 129

BROADWAY LIBRARY

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The Dime Novel As An Historian's Tool

By William A. Settle, Jr.

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The historian uses any source which helps him understand the past, and this is particularly true of the social historian with his broad view of the nature of history. However, his specialized courses often are titled Social and Intellectual History of the United States. These and even studies of the social forces in American history have emphasized the intellectual forces and the impact of ideas. The close relationship between history and literature, political theory, and philosophy is taken for granted. Good literature, the theatre, music, and art mirror and influence the history of their times.

The academic historian explaining the American character has worked mainly with materials of intellectual depth or with those that for some reason particularly interest him. This practice probably accounts for the fact that a huge volume of sub-literary fiction written for and read by the masses with its clues as to how its readers thought, dreamed, and formed their value systems has gone relatively unmined. But the ore is there for those who will dig.

For the fifty years from 1860 to 1910 the loosely defined dime novel offers a field for study. Interestingly, many dime novels were not novels and probably more dime novels sold for a nickel than for a dime, but each contained a story of substantial length complete in one issue. Once a series was started it was issued periodically, usually weekly.¹

When the firm of Irwin P. Beadle & Co. which later became Beadle & Adams published "Malaeska; the In-

dian Wife of the White Hunter" by Mrs. Ann S. Stephens on June 9, 1860 after advertising is as "A Dollar Book For A Dime," the dime novel was born. It was a reprint of a story that had run serially in *The Ladies' Companion* twenty years before. "Seth Jones; or, The Captives of the Frontier" by Edward S. Ellis, published on October 2, 1860, was Beadle's eighth dime novel. The sales of Seth Jones assured success to Beadle's new venture. By 1897, when the Beadle firm ceased existence it had issued about twenty-five series of novels. Numerous stories were reprinted in different series and even in the same series with new titles and only slight, if any, change in content.²

Beadle & Adams had two competitors—Street & Smith and Frank Toussay—who exceeded it in dime novel publication and perhaps a dozen others at various times.³ Well documented circulation figures are scarce. In his "Golden Multitudes," Frank Luther Mott said that only two dime novels can safely be put on the overall list of best sellers. "Malaeska" and "Seth Jones" both met the 300,000 sales total Mott required of books published in the 1860's. He reported that by 1865 individual dime novel sales ranged from 35,000 to 80,000.⁴ There are claims that Seth Jones" sold 600,000 copies.⁵ Gilbert Patten, creator of the Frank and Dick Merriwell stories, whose pseudonym was Burt L. Standish, has estimated that for several years the *Tip Top Weekly* in which the Merriwell tales were told had a circulation of at least 200,000 per issue.⁶

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Although these claims are unsupported by records, there is no reason to doubt that more than a billion dime novels had been printed and sold by 1910, and some were still being printed in the 1920's.

Other facts are noteworthy. One's image of a dime novel may be a small booklet, approximately four and a half by six and a half or seven inches in size, with or without a colored cover or illustration and 100 or more pages. Or the image may recall cheap pulp booklets of sixteen or thirty-two pages approximating the size of a sheet of standard typing paper printed in two, three, or even four columns with a black line illustration on the front page. Nearly all the nickel series came to have colored covers. The length was either in the 25,000 to 40,000 word or the 60,000 to 80,000 category.⁷ Dime novel authors could turn them out as fast as one could write in longhand; this sometimes meant 50,000 to 70,000 words a week and the advent of the typewriter increased the speed. The usual practice was to use a pseudonym and some writers had many. A few were among the second rate writers of their time, but most of them were hacks.⁸

Early in dime novel publishing it became the practice to use a title and a subtitle. Many of the combinations are entertaining in themselves: "Double Dan, the Dastard; or, The Pirates of the Pecos." "Ker-whoop! Ker-Whoo!; or, The Tarantula of Taos." "Belshazzar Brick, the Bailiff of Blue Blazes; or, Four Horse Frank's Frolic at Bad Luck Bar." "The Doomed Dozen; or, Dolores, the Danite's Daughter, A Romance of Border Trails and Mormon Mysteries." "Desperate Duke, the Guadaloupe Galoot; or, The Angel of Alamo City."

Most of the dime novels were about fictitious people but many had as their main characters real persons. These included Daniel Boone, Kit Carson, Wild Bill Hickok, George Custer, Buffalo Bill, Sitting Bull, Geronimo, Jesse James, and Davy Crockett. Scarcely a hero of the American frontier was overlooked. Cap Collier, Deadwood Dick, Old Sleuth, Frank

Reade, Jack Harkaway, Nick Carter, Old King Brady, Frank and Dick Merriwell and Diamond Dick became just as real to those who read about them weekly.

Many titles printed as dime novels had been published before and those stories first published as dime novels were written by craftsmen of considerable skill. but as a competitive market developed, creativeness was forgotten and quality declined. The early themes came out of the American Revolution and the frontier experience and James Fennimore Cooper's Leatherstocking furnished a prototype for the heroes. These tales of adventure and love in time degenerated into sensationalism.

Conflicting claims are made as to whether parental objection ran boys to corn cribs, haylofts and attics with their dime novels. One hears of a youth being taken to the woodshed for a leather strapping by an angry father who caught him reading a dime novel and just as many denials that fathers who read the books themselves forbade their children to read them. Contemporaries sometimes said that the father who walloped his boy for reading a dime novel would have licked him for something anyway. Dime novels were read, despite their vocabulary of polysyllabic words, by readers of all ages and in varied stations of life.⁹

Scapegoats are always sought to provide easy explanations for problems with complex causes and in the late nineteenth century the dime novel did not escape. It was attacked from the pulpit, editorially, and by countless do-gooders as the culprit to blame for the delinquency of youth.¹⁰ The critics of the dime novel might well provide the historian with a topic for research.

One Bert Blake, according to an account told as the truth, ran away from home, taking his .22 calibre revolver and \$1.85. He surely had gone west to fight Indians and his mother concluded he had been reading dime novels. In two days he returned and vowed he had never read a dime novel, but the poisonous influence of

four other books accounted for the desperate step he had taken. They were the reader, arithmetic, geography and speller used at school.¹¹

Dime novels are not the origin of typically American character traits, attitudes, and traditions, but they surely helped to fix them upon the American mind. One example relates to the popular idea of the self-made man in America. Dime novel publishing coincided with industrialization and the rapid growth of big business whose leaders appealed to the theories of classical economics, the gospel of wealth, and Social Darwinism in support of unregulated capitalism. From the pulpits, professorial chairs, halls of legislative bodies, and the press came the defense of business practices. Yet, it is doubtful that any of these had so great an impact upon the American masses or influenced their understanding or misunderstanding of American economic life as greatly as the more than one hundred "Rags to Riches" stories of Horatio Alger, Jr. Usually the point was missed that while the poor boy's initial steps up the ladder of success were the results of his virtue and industrious labor, there was always some fortuitous stroke of circumstance that enabled him to get his hands on some capital.¹²

Alger was not a dime novel author, but millions of boys read his stories in dime novel format and dime novel writers adopted his formula. Charles Bragin, dime novel collector and dealer, wrote in an introduction to a facsimile copy of an Alger story that Alger was the most imitated of all writers, and he estimated that every one of his novels had at least ten dime novel imitations.¹³ If this claim is correct, the transit of attitudes from one class level to another was assisted by America's "penny dreadful."

The production of dime novels is part of any history of publishing in the United States, and both academic scholars and popular writers who have written in that field have taken note of it. Frank Luther Mott's "History of American Magazines"¹⁴ explains how it grew out of book pub-

lishing practices and the story papers in the decades preceding it and how the cheap pulp magazines of the twentieth century evolved from it. Similarly, Mary Noel's "Villains Galore!"¹⁵ fits the dime novels into her study of one hundred years of the story paper business in the United States. Quentin Reynold's "The Fiction Factory,"¹⁶ a history of Street & Smith, gives much significant information about that firm's experience in dime novel making and especially about its dealings with its authors like Gilbert Patten, and another one who stayed with the firm only a short time, Upton Sinclair. Edmund Pearson, a popular writer, published in 1929 the only book to date that deals exclusively and in general with the dime novel. It was reissued in 1968.¹⁷ Pearson knew his subject firsthand and he wrote lightly and entertainingly but with enthusiasm and some insight into both the dime novel and its times.

Since July, 1864, when William Everett wrote his comments on the dime novel for the "North American Review," articles about dime novel authors, characters, publishers, themes, and readers have been printed in the leading popular magazines. These at least keep the memory of the paperback thrillers alive, but they seldom are deeply analytical.¹⁸

This is not the case with an essay by Professor Merle Curti published in "The Yale Review" in 1937 which examined the relation of the dime novel to the American tradition.¹⁹ He saw the dime novel as meeting the demands of the common people who were becoming reading-conscious with the rise of free public schools and the penny press. "Above all," he said, "through these novels people could gain a renewed faith in the desirability of self-reliance and the possibility of achievement, which their authors extolled." Promotion of the spirit of adventure, rugged individualism, solution of problems through single-handed effort rather than by a social attack, the popular idea of the self-made man, exaltation of the humble man, and sympathy for the

underdog—themes which ran through dime novels—supported that faith.

The American Revolution had provided more titles than any single theme save the frontier in the dime novels examined by Curti. These frequently interpreted the struggle for independence as a social movement designed, in part, to supplant the rule of a privileged aristocracy. Readers were encouraged to believe in the inevitability of the war; there was no place for honest or idealistic dissent. The American people were exalted above all others and an American nationalism was promoted. The frontier was glorified and idealized as a distinctive American phenomenon. Thus the West entered for the first time into the consciousness of a large number of Americans.

NOTES

1. Albert Johannsen, "The House of Beadle and Adams and Its Nickel and Dime Novels" (3 vols.; Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950 and 1962), I, 3-6.

2. Ibid., pp. 30-37, 68-72; Quentin Reynolds, "The Fiction Factory" (New York: Random House, Inc., 1955), p. 72.

3. Reynolds, "The Fiction Factory," p. 76.

4. Frank Luther Mott, "Golden Multitudes" (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947), pp. 149-151, 308.

5. John Levi Cutler, "Gilbert Patten and His Frank Merriwell Saga: A Study in Sub-literary Fiction, 1896-1913," *The Maine Bulletin*, Vol. XXXVI, No. 10 (Orono, Maine: The University Press, May, 1934), 21.

6. Ibid., p. 31.

7. Johannsen, "The House of Beadle and Adams," I, pp. 3-6, describes the Beadle publications and says the Beadle booklet type novels contained either 35,000 to 40,000 or 70,000 to 80,000 words.

8. Cutler, "Gilbert Patten," pp. 23-24; Edmund Pearson, "Dime Novels; or, Following an Old Trail in Popular Literature" (Port Washington, N. Y.: Kennikat Press, Inc., 1968), pp. 105-106.

9. Pearson, *Dime Novels*, pp. 90-104.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid., pp. 86-89.

12. Frederick L. Allen, "The Big Change" (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1952), pp. 63-65, 69-70, 80 and 149.

13. Dime Novel Club facsimile reprint of "Adrift in New York; or, Dodger and Florence Braving the World," by Horatio Alger, Jr., Number 45 of "The Brave and the Bold," October 31, 1903, a Street & Smith series.

14. Frank Luther Mott, "History of American Magazine," Volume II, 1850-1865, and Volume III, 1865-1885 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938), *passim*.

15. Mary Noel, "Villains Galore . . . The Heyday of the Popular Story Weekly" (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1954).

16. See reference note 2 above.

17. See reference note 8 above.

18. Michael K. Simmons, "The Dime Novel and the American Mind," "Man-kind," II (October, 1969), 58-63, is the latest and one of the best to come to this author's attention.

(To be continued)

MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

334. Dr. Robert L. Dartt, 33 Franklin St., Cedar Grove, N. J. 07009 (New member)

335. R. Gordon Kelly, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pa. 19104 (New member)

272. Brian W. Dippie, Dept. of History, Univ. of Victoria, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada (Change of address)

336. Daryl E. Jones, 217 East Point Lane D-10, East Lansing, Mich. 48823 (New member)

E. C. Toewe, Box 429 Rt. 1, Apollo, Pa. 15613 (from Miss Thelma Toewe c/o PPG Industries, Creighton, Pa. 15030)

ODDS 'N' ENDS

by Jack Schorr

When you drive by 7402 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, you will see a sign which reads "ADCO Sports Book Exchange." A most unusual store, owned and operated by Goodwin Goldfadin and Esther Goldfadin. It's more than a book store, for within its confines are contained every conceivable book, poster, program, trading cards, trophies, photographs, autographs, record albums, dime novels that pertain to sports. One-half million items, not counting photographs and trading cards. Mr. Goldfadin can lay his hand on any item in a minute.

Goodwin Goldfadin started to collect various books and items pertaining to sports at the age of 11. He was trading, buying and selling at that age and has been doing this ever since. That was 44 years ago. He has been in the Los Angeles area for 25 years, and at the present address for 15 years.

Some of the oldest items he has in stock date back to 1820; an English book on boxing and books on pedestrianism dated 1813 are among the stock.

Among the customers are some of the well-known figures of the sports world, stage and movie industry. James Earl Jones, who is currently working on "Great White Hope" came by a while back and purchased two scrapbooks by the trainer of Jack Johnson for \$600.00. Mr. Jones was the great hope of Broadway.

George Allen, coach of the Rams, has been a customer from time to time. He receives calls from radio and television studios to furnish technical data on various sports. Coaches from universities all over the world have written Goldfadin from time to time. His mail comes from all over the nation and many foreign countries.

I saw many things of interest while in his store. Aside from the many early boys juvenile books on sports, which is where my interest lies, I saw one of the original programs dated 1914 for the opening of Braves

Field in Boston. Then there were official programs of the World Heavyweight Championship fight Willard-vs.-Dempsey, 1919, Toledo, Ohio, with a 25c unused admission ticket stapled to it. There was a five-record album of Chuck Evans' "Golf Secrets" by Brunswick in mint condition. There were 514 copies of the old Physical Culture Magazine, complete runs from Vol. #1, March, 1899, to December, 1941, lacking 11 issues, all in nice condition.

There were boxes and boxes of trading cards that brought back many memories, as a boy trading "baseball player" cards.

He has a nice collection of juvenile books on sports by Standish, "Big League Series," Chadwick "College Sport Series," "Baseball Joes," books by Dudley, Heyliger, Barbour, Sherman, etc.

What did I buy there? Well, I found a couple of books I wanted. A mint copy of "Rockspur Nine" by Patten, and the first novel written on baseball, "Our Baseball Club" by Noah Brooks.

It was the most enjoyable couple of hours I have spent in a long time. Goodwin Goldfadin is a most knowledgeable man on sports and books and dime novels—on anything, for that matter—pertaining to sports.

Back numbers Reckless Ralph's Dime Novel Roundup, Nos. 1 to 237, some reprints, 12 for \$1.00 or all for \$21. Sent postpaid. You also get Dime Novel Catalogue, Birthday No. 2, indexes, #1 Pioneer and Scouts of the West.

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NOTED DIME NOVEL COLLECTOR DIES IN TOWACO, N. J.

Kezar Falls — George Washington French, 87, of Towaco, N. J., a native of Parsonsfield, died Sunday in a Towaco nursing home where he had been a patient one week.

His photographs of Maine scenes, often seen on calendars and greeting cards, had won prizes in this country and abroad.

He began his career as a commercial photographer in 1903 and authored a book, "The Amateur Photographer," for the New York Institute of Photography. From 1936 to 1955 when he semi-retired, he was a photographer for the Maine Development Commission.

French was born in the Kezar Falls area of Parsonsfield, Aug. 17, 1882, the son of John S. and Francena French. He had lived in Bloomfield and Towaco, N. J., for several years, returning to the old French homestead each summer until ill health prevented the trip two years ago.

He was educated in Pillsbury district schools, graduated from Parsonsfield Seminary in 1902 and attended Bridgton Academy. He graduated in 1908 from Bates College, where he was a star athlete in football and baseball. He set a college mark in the hammer throw that stood for seven years, was a prize winner in the dumbbell drill team, and was assistant to the physical education director.

French organized the Boy Scout troop in Monson, and taught school for several years in Deerfield, Mass., where he met his wife, the former Margaret Sear of West Holly, Mass. She died several years ago, after they celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in 1961.

He gave up teaching and became self-employed in the photography business in 1922. A member of many photographic organizations, his honors included a medal from the Japan Photographic Salon, Tokyo.

Also known as a collector, French at one time had a collection of 18,000 dime novels, the largest such collection in the country.

He was an ardent horseshoe player, becoming a champion at age 16 and winning the Three-Quarter Century Club championship at age 75.

He was a former member of Orchard Grange, East Parsonsfield; Ossipee Lodge, Kezar Falls; Westminster Presbyterian Church, Bloomfield; and a charter member of the Parsonsfield-Porter Historical Society. He held numerous offices in athletic groups and camera clubs. He was a member of the Dime Novel Roundup since the early 30's.

Surviving are a son, Donald S., Towaco, N. J.; a daughter, Mrs. Allen (Barbara) Zane, Highland Park, Mich., five grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

Graveside services were at Ridge-lawn Cemetery, Clifton, N. J.

LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

Dear Ed: It hardly seems possible that another year has sped by. As usual I had to be reminded that my subscription had expired. Sorry about that. Hope you and your family are well. Time flies. Hardly seems possible that it's some 22 years since I visited you people in Fall River. Some day I just must take time off and come down and visit you. Enclosed find \$4.00—extra dollar for inconvenience, etc.

I plan to continue my membership in the Roundup as long as I can although I no longer collect. Some time the bug might strike me again. If you have room you might mention in the Roundup that I'm looking for the following two books by Clarence E. Mulford: Carson of the J. C. and Me and Shorty. Sincerely, Dan Bundza, 31 Stoneleigh Rd., Worcester, Massachusetts 01606.

WANTED

Boys Books by Lange, Ellis, Optic, Bonehill. Bound Volumes of Argosy, 1890's. Magazines with Alger Serials.

Willard D. Thompson

Box 1741, Portland, Oregon 97207

NEWSY NEWS

By Ralph F. Cummings

Ed Levy is looking for a copy of Miller's Dime Novel Authors. Who has a copy for sale. If you have a copy, write to him at Pleasant Hill, Woodbridge, Conn.

Any member or private individual having any of the old Beadles N. Y. Saturday Journals that were office copies, please get in touch with Mr. Ralph F. Adimari, 39 N. 5th Avenue, Mt. Vernon, N. Y. If not for sale, Ralph would like to get the loan of them for a short time—he will pay postage both ways, and insurance. He will also take good care of them while they are in his possession. (I'll vouch for that. Ed.)

I understand from Ralph F. Adimari that the general impression goes, is that Jesse James died poor, and his expression as a reader, will have perceived, but in tracing the career of Jesse, the Outlaw, and his bloody class, he has fulfilled the intentions of the story. Ralph sent me a clipping a while back, dated N. Y. Times, Aug. 23, 1962, that a new series of paper back juvenile series were to be started the next month, by the publishing firm of Grosset & Dunlap, Inc., for readers between 11 and 16, called Tempo books, to be sold at 50 cents per copy.

Clyde Wakefield sold me most of his old novels, still he has a few he read when he was a boy, and some story papers, too. He will buy any he can use, if of interest to him.

Eli A. Messier is back in the fold again, he has books and novels for sale, try him.

W. R. Johnson is still interested in "oil novels" with nice illustrations of oil covers on them, oil drilling and so on. He also wants "Land Claim," of Nebraska, or part of Nebraska is in it, of which he wishes to get for his wife's cousin who lives in part of Nebraska. His H. H. Bro. #112.

Denis R. Rogers H. H. Bro. #85 (77 Murray Avenue, Bromley, Kent, England) also likes used U.S. stamps, as well as novels on Edward S. Ellis. He has collected U. S. stamps (used

only) for many years now on a strictly simplified basis; in fact, he has them right back to the Zeppelin issues, of which he only has the 65c issue, he would like to get the \$1.30 and \$2.65 if he could. He also wants of the Columbian issue, the two big ones, up over the 50c issue.

WANTED

Dime Novels by Sam S. Hall.
Paperback published by J. S. Ogilvie.
Anything on the James, Daltons, or Youngers.

Give title, date, condition, and price.

R. H. Porter

P. O. Box 38, Austin, Texas 78767

**STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP,
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Free distribution	10	5
Total distribution	321	338
Office use, left-over, etc.	179	162
Total	500	500

I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete.

Edward T. LeBlanc

REAL WEST MAGAZINE continues its series of dime novel photos and sketches. The November issue features Diamond Dick, the December issue, Young Klondike.

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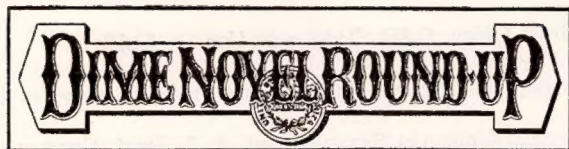
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